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STUDENT POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN ITALY.

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LIKE STUDENTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES, ITALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DISPLAY INCREASINGLY MILITANT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AIMED AT EDUCATIONAL REFORM. NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS FULL OF MULTIPARTY INTRICACIES, NOR THE INDIFFERENT PUBLIC CAN PROVIDE REFORMS. DISTRUSTING THE POLITICIANS AND DISILLUSIONED WITH BUREAUCRACY, STUDENTS HAVE TURNED TO RADICAL PARTIES FOR CHANGES IN OUTMODED CURRICULUM, POOR UNIVERSITY CONDITIONS, REGIMENTATION, AND THE ALIENATION OF THE UNIVERSITY FROM SOCIETY. THEY HOPE TO ACHIEVE CHANGE BY SEEKING A VOICE IN UNIVERSITY POLICY MAKING AND BY INTRODUCING SCHOLASTIC DEMANDS INTO THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT. (CC)

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STUDENT POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN ITALY

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There is sufficient evidence around the world that student activity in the institutions of higher education has become more militant and that students are more concerned with their political roles. In many nations student activism has had a notable influence in political and social reform. Student movements in South America, India, South Korea, Bolivia, and Indonesia have produced governmental change and reform. In more extreme cases, for example Turkey and Japan, massive student agitation has been responsible for the decline of governments.[1] Student action has also had its effects on the educational process. Worthy of note are developments in Italy where militant student groups are critical of the pitifully slow progress recent legislation has made in improving conditions at the university level.

The Italian parliament has been slow in passing the extension of Italy's school development bill for the successive five year period of June, 1965-70. The new bill is an attempt to modernize Italy's university system.[2] There are signs of pressure from many quarters in Italy for meaningful university reforms, for a move

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* Recently returned from Italy where he is conducting a study of developments in Italian higher education. The research is supported by a United States Office of Education grant for a period of one year.

1 Seymour Martin Lipset comments editorially on this point in a special issue of Comparative Education Review. The issue includes also a number of well documented articles analyzing student roles in politics and higher education in some of the emerging nations. Vol. 10, No. 2, June, 1966.

2 See "Linnee directive del piano di sviluppo pluriennale della scuola per il periodo successivo al 30 Giugno, 1965," No. 1073 September, 1964, Minnistero della Pubblica Istruzione, Roma, or "Trends in Italian Higher Education," School and Society, Summer, 1966, pp. 272-274.

away from purely liberal and humanitarian studies and toward the training required of university graduates in a modern scientific and industrial society.[3] Although university enrollments indicate a 50% increase by 1970, more must be accomplished in assisting students to complete secondary schooling and enter the university. Historically, Italy has resisted equality of educational opportunity and has maintained a rigid educational elite. The inadequacies of the universities include shortage of instructors, crowded classrooms, outmoded lecture halls, and buildings, inadequate financing, and outdated curriculum and a lack of teaching facilities.

Among the students we note a tendency to form more meaningful political groups to improve the content and conditions of higher education in Italy. The Italian university student has always been involved in political affairs, and the universities have a rich history of student participation which can be documented from the medieval period, to the time of Garibaldi's victory for unification, to the social reforms of Mazzini, to World Wars I and II.[4] In general, however,

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3 A few of the recent writings critical of university studies are: Giovanni Calo, "L'universita in rapporto alle nuove strutture ed esigenze della societa contemporanea," Annali della Pubblica Istruzione, Gen-Feb., 1964. G.M. Bertin, "La scuola e la societa Italiana in transformazione," Scuola e Citta, Sept., 1964. A book by Alberto Sensini is critical of the proposed reforms stating that they lack shape and content and ignore scientific and technological development in Italy; La riforma universita, Firenze: Sansoni, 1966.

4 See Helen Zimmern and Antonio Agresti, New Italy, (New York: Chautauqua, 1920) p. 91. For interesting accounts of undergraduate activities in the medieval university see R.S. Rait, Life in the Medieval University, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1937) or Pearl Kimbre, Scholarly Privileges During the Middle Ages, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959).

student activity in Italy has been confined to a very small percentage of students whose demands were usually manifested by such visible forms of activity as street demonstrations, strikes, riots, picket signs, and the like. The evidence in recent months points to a revival of student political interest and participation whereby student groups would have a legitimate and powerful voice in the affairs of the university. Student leaders are seeking a more active role, using the political process to stimulate improved university conditions.

In the last year the fact has clearly emerged that students have become more conscious of their own political power. Recent student disturbances at the university of Rome, where 60,000 students are enrolled, resulted in the resignation of the rector.[5] The growth in enrollment in Italy's universities will provide a good base of strength in numbers for student groups.[6]

The nature of student political organizations must be explained in the light of Italy's political structure and the general attitude of Italians toward politics. Since student organizations tend to associate with the branches of the various political parties and reflect their political philosophy, the following is relevant to a comprehension of student political behavior.

Italy has a multiparty system composed of nine active political parties. The three major parties, which gain over 80 percent of the national vote, are: the

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5 Italian newspapers made interesting news of the forced resignation of Professor Giuseppe Papi, rector of the university of Rome, after he had become involved in student demonstrations between Facist and anti-Facists student groups. An excellent English translation of the story can be seen in Minerva, IV, 4 (Summer, 1966), p. 586.

6 Consider the potential student political power at the universities of Rome, Milan, and Naples--for example, where the combined student population is over one hundred thousand students.

Christian Democratic party, the Italian Communist party and the Italian Socialist party.[7] Political progress is complex since no party has a substantial majority and each party views governmental policy from a different perspective. If one examines election results in Italy, one can understand the inability of the Italian parliament to form a majority vote on specific issues. Moreover, one can understand why governments in Italy come and go with such confusing regularity and why political parties in Italy are so fragmented. The political system has been referred to as one of "unstabilized stability."[8]

The intricacies of Italian party politics are the result of long standing and complex factors, but most recently they stem from a rapidly changing Italian society. Italy has been undergoing swift technological and industrial development. Economic improvement[9] has given hope for the good life to many. There are signs of prosperity at all levels: this year, steel and automobile production is at a new high; tourism is up some 15 percent; telephone and television sets sold has nearly doubled; employment is at a respectable level; exports have risen some 20 percent, and trade with countries within the Common market and with other countries in Europe has been at a high.

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7 A recent survey shows the following voter strength: Christian Democrats, 41.2%, Italian Communists, 26%, Italian Socialists, 13.8%. At this writing the Communist party seems to be in a state of ambivalence suffering from a lack of leadership. In 1966 out of 306 communes voting for mayor, only 239 mayors were voted back into office. See E.A. Bayne, "Non-Crisis in Italy," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 45, No. 2, Jan., 1967, pp. 354-55.

8 J.P.C. Carey and A.G. Carey, "The Italian Elections of 1958-Unstable Stability in an Unstable World," Political Science Quarterly, Dec., 1958, p. 566 and P.A. Allum, "The Italian Elections of 1963-64," Political Studies, Vol. XIII, 1965, pp. 324-45. Both articles deal with the complexity of elections in Italy.

9 There is evidence that the Italian economy is strengthening its recovery from the recession. My personal interview with Miss Wilkowski, economic advisor at the American embassy in Rome, confirms this evidence. Data is available from her office. See Annual Statistical Bulletin, American Embassy, Rome, June, 1966; also The Italian Economy in the Spring of 1966, unpublished, American Embassy, Rome, June 3, 1966.

Industrial development normally brings with it rapid urbanization. This is true in Italy as evidenced by the movement of workers to the North to seek employment and better living conditions. Although some industrial development has been going on in the South, a visit to this area quickly confirms the notable gap between North and South. In many instances the appearance is of two distinct social and cultural entities, each section looking at the other with disdain, mistrust and hostility.[10]

Cultural and class divisions as characterized in the North and South do not tend to support a stable political system. Scholars who have studied this problem know that social diversity as exemplified in Italy produces inadequate political communication, fragmentation, and isolation.[11] Many Italians are isolated from the news, unconcerned with developments in their society, and without opinions on contemporary issues. This political isolation is not a problem of the entire society, to be sure, yet the contention does have support from a variety of studies.

The data of one study draws the picture of Italian political culture as one of alienation and of social isolation and distrust. It points out that Italians are lacking in national pride and are not likely to participate in political affairs.[12] On a questionnaire seventy-two percent of respondents, aged 18-25, indicated little or no interest in national and international affairs.[13] In another study completed

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10 Writings concerning the South are voluminous. A concise treatment of these problems can be located in II Veltro, Vol. VI, Dec., 1962.

11 See Joseph LaPalombara, Interest Groups in Italian Politics, (Princeton, 1964), p. 55.

12 Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations, (Boston: Little and Brown, 1965, p. 308.)

13 Joseph LaPalombara, "L'Orientamento politico dello gioventu," in Atberto Spreafico and Joseph LaPalombara (eds.) Elezioni e comporamento politico in Italia (Milan, 1962), pp. 495-516.

in France, Italians ranked lowest in knowledge of European issues which involved them. Only 23 percent had any awareness of the Common Market. An overwhelming 67% had little interest in political matters.[14]

Among university students today political attitudes do not vary significantly from those of the general public. Although they tend to be more interested and knowledgeable about political matters, students regard the political system with mistrust and disdain. Talks with students at a number of Italian universities verify their disillusionment with the bureaucracy.[15] Therefore, student political participation is limited.

Those who do participate in student political activity tend to support the radical groups, left and right. Although there has been a large degree of support for the center party, the Christian Democrats, this party has not been successful in pushing university reforms. Hence, voting among Italian youth now seems to favor the Communists and Socialists on the left; the Monarchists and the Italian Social Movement on the right. Italian youth are fairly confused about their political values. Their voting behavior is strongly tied to gratification; support of a political party depends upon the degree of satisfaction youth have with present conditions.[16]

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[14] Conducted by the l'Institut Francais d'Opinion Publique for Gallup International (Paris, 1962) and quoted in Foreign Affairs, op. cit., p. 361.

[15] I spoke with students from the universities of Rome, Bologna, and Perugia asking them of their political associations. The general impression was that they were not concerned. To obtain a degree, to secure employment, to maintain financial security, and to seek better living standards seemed to be their primary preoccupation.

[16] Joseph LaPalombara and Jerry Waters, "Values, Expectations, and Political Predispositions of Italian Youth," Midwest Journal of Political Science, Vol. 5, 1961, p. 57.

In each of Italy's forty universities or institutes of university rank, there is an elected group of students which represents the entire student body. In most cases the student organization is a member of the national student organization called Unione Nazionale Universitaria Rappresentativa Italiana or U.N.U.R.I. According to its constitution one of the primary functions of U.N.U.R.I. is to represent student interests to policy making bodies who are responsible for improvement of the university.[17] The intention is to involve students in university policy making. U.N.U.R.I. unavoidably becomes involved in political activity since the university is under government control. Unfortunately, the impact of U.N.U.R.I. has been less than desirable since it has not been able to unite students in a common cause for university reform. Although U.N.U.R.I. purposes to cut across party lines, its effectiveness has been weakened because it too runs up against idealogical fragmentation.

There are four affiliates of U.N.U.R.I., each representing a different political persuasion. The two major affiliates are the Unione Goliardica Italiana (U.G.I.), composed of student activists from the Socialist, Republican, Communist and Radical parties and the Intesa, consisting of Catholic students who support the Christian Democrats and the Church. Two other groups represent the extreme liberal student groups and the neo-fascists on the right. They are Associazione Goliardica Indipendenti (A.G.I.) and Fronte Universitario di Azione Nazionale (F.U.A.N.) respectively At a recent Congress in Viareggio, Italy, these student groups attempted to come to some consensus as to the role of the Italian university in a modern and changing socie

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17 "Unione Nazionale Universitaria Rappresentativa Italiana," Statuto, (Rome, 1957), Art. 1-6.

18 Reputable Italian newspapers provide readable accounts of the debates. The accounts portray the student as more active and concerned with social problems. See for example, "Gli universitari vogliono dar vita a degli organisimi piu rappresentativi," Il Messaggero, March 23, 1966; and "Associazioni universitarie in polemica," Il Corriere della Sera, Jan. 4, 1967.

Out of the student debates has come a movement called sindacalismo studentesco.[19] The movement is an attempt to organize the students within the various affiliates of U.N.U.R.I. to exert political pressure on the legislature.

Students want change, a change away from the medieval characteristics which still pervade the system; from regimentation; from an irrelevant curriculum; from the universities' alienation from contemporary society. The student syndicalistic movement is an attempt to make known specific problems in a unified way through the political process. It is not purported to be a revolutionary movement to overthrow democratic procedures; nor is it an attempt to establish a corporate society to control university policy. It is, more dramatically, a movement by students, designed to transmit in orderly fashion scholastic demands to the Italian parliament.

Student leaders are hopeful that the movement will not be reduced to a critical defense of petty political interests and that significant problems can be solved to the benefit of both the university and the Italian community. As one leader has stated, "The only objective of student syndicalism is a modern and efficient school system, where, in a spirit of collaboration, students, faculty, and governmental agencies can prescribe the role of the university in modern society.[20]

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19 Syndicalism is the French word for trade-unionism and was implemented where unions were weak--for example, in France, Spain and Italy. For similarities between French and Italian student movements see, Jean-Pierre Worms, "The French Student Movement," Comparative Education Review, op. cit., pg. 359; "Sindacalismo giovanile; gli interessi degli studenti," Il Corriere della Sera, Oct. 5, 1966; and "Nuovo corso del movimento studentesco," Il Corriere della Sera, Dec. 28, 1966.

20 This statement was made by Dr. Carrado Aforza Fogliani, vice-president of the Liberal Italian Youth in an article "Il ruolo dello studente nella societa moderna," Il Corriere della Sera, Oct. 12, 1966.